ICONOGRAPHY OF SOME BUDDHIST IMAGES DISCOVERED FROM TĪRABHUKTI

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Excavations have been made at the sites of Chirand Basārh (Vaiśālī) Śvetapura, Naulāgarha, Katra, and Balirajgarh. Some valuable pieces of pottery, Buddhist images have been found in these places. Some excavation reports have come to definite conclusions. Numerous images of the Buddha and some beautiful fragments of Buddhist art and other objects throw light on the spread of Buddhist culture in this region of Bihar[1] during early medieval period. The following Buddhist sites deserve special mention.

Kolhuā, Ponjha (Vaiśālī), Chougāmā, Pandaul, Jarahatiya and Andhrādhāri (Madhubani district), Jayamangalāgarh, Bihat, Samho in the Begusarai district. Of these Naulāgarh and Jayamanglāgarh are most important and second only to Vaiśālī, Mathali, Mehisi, Birpur, Srinagara in the district of Saharsa and Gorodiha in the district of Purnea.

On the basis of the material discovered from the Naulāgarh,[2] it can be said that Naulāgarh (Begusarai district) had a continuous history of Buddhism from the beginning of the Buddhist age down to the Muslim period.

The exploration of Jayamangalāgarh, situated very close to the other ancient fort, Manglāgarh in the Samastipur district and other adjoining sites has furnished valuable things discovery of the black Pāla stone images, ranging from the Gandhāra School to the Eastern Pāla School of early medieval sculptures from Bihat, Birpur, Naulāgarh and Jayamanglāgarh indicate the existence of big ancient establishments in this part.[2] A black stone image of Bodhisattva in Gandhāra style has also been discovered there.

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1. *G. D. College, Begusarai, Bulletin Series* Nos. 1-2.
2. *G. D. College Begusarai, Bulletin* No. 2, p. 1.

A small black stone image belonging to the Gandhāra School has been found in Bihat village. It is evident from its headdress which represents the Buddhist art of the Gupta period.[3]

We have another very fine image of standing Buddha surrounded other images of Buddha in various mudras. The pedestal of the image bears an inscription which is the famous Buddhist mantra[4] as found on other similar Buddhist images of the period. Palaeographically it can be placed in the ninth century A. D. This image is now in possession of Sri Bisheshwar Narayan Singh of Begusarai.[5] A similar image in black stone with the same inscription is preserved in village Samho in Begusarai district and is now preserved by the villagers.[6]

A rare image of Avalokitesvara Buddha in black stone bearing an inscription was discovered in Lakhisarai (Munger district). It is now preserved in the Sir Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta University, Calcutta.[7] Different images of the Buddha in different mudras have been found in Mathiahi (Madhepura district). Several Buddhist images have found in Mehisi village, an old seat of the Maithila Brahmaṇas (Saharsa district).

Recently an unique image of Namsangiti Mañjuśrī has been discovered from Ramchaura Ghat near Hazipur. Iconographically it is unique and not discovered in India before this.[8] In Sultanganj (Bhagalpur district), Buddhist remains were discovered as far back as 1864. The most important image was the colossal figure of Buddha (Now preserved in the Birmingham museum). The status weighing nearly one ton is of copper. The figure bears a close resemblance to the sand stone status largely found at Saranatha. It stands in abhayamudra.

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3. *Ibid.*, No. 2. p. 20.
4. *Ibid.*, p., 20-21.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-22. N. K. Bhattasali, *Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum*, Dacca, pp. 16-29. (16-19)
6. *G. D. College, Begusarai, Bulletin Series No. 2, pp. 22.*
7. Ashutosh Museum, *Modern Review* 1951, p. 377.
8. This image is preserved in the Tantrik Siva Temple of Ramchauraghat in the Vaishali Distric. Image is recently discovered by Dr. Rajendra Ram of the Department of History, Patna University and Sri Ram Bilash Jha, journalist.

The pieces of Buddhist art were discovered in course of a trial exacavation conducted in the Chaugāmā village in Baherā (Darbhanga district). Some exceptionally beautiful relics of metal images have also been unearthed.[9]

A red stone image of the Buddha, weighing about 30 mounds belonging to the Gupta period has been discovered in a village near Pandaul in Madhubani district. A big image of the Dhyāni Buddha was unearthed in a field to the rest of the tank, said to have been dug by order of Mahārājā Bhairava Sinha of the Oinavara dynasty of Mithila in village Jarahatiya[10] in Madhubani district. The image also bore an inscription on the pedestal, but it was too blurred to be deciphered.

Saptari, Bhala pargana Buddhama (Buddhagrama), Ratnapura, Brahmapura, Visala, Vethadiya or Betia, Radhia and Mathia (in Champaran district) and other places were strongholds of Buddhism in Tīrabhukti as described in *Mithilamahatmya.*[11]

Brahmanism and Buddhism flourished side by side in Tīrabhukti though Buddhism gradually lost its hold among the followers. However, the process of borrowing and intermingling never stopped. The Hindus borrowed art ideals from the images of the Buddhist goddesses like Tara, Manasa, Chhinnamasta, all symbolising the Sakti cult. The Buddhists, on the other hand absorbed the art ideals of Hindu deities like Yakses-vara, Gandhari, Dhyans Aparajita and others.[12] It is true, the latest form of Vajrayana weakened Buddhist influence on every aspect of Indian life, but is also true that it has left a permanent mark on the culture of India.

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9. R. K. Choudhary, "Discoveries in North Bihar" *JBRS*, vol. XLIII, pp 365 ff.
10. Upendra Thakur, *History of Mithila*, Mithila Research Institute, Darbhanga, 1956, Chap VI.
11. Parmeshwar Jha, *Mithila Mahatmya*, Darbhanga, p. 92.
12. R. K, Chaudhary, *Bihar, the homeland of Buddhism*. Chap. V.

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